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Lucia A Keegan 08/21/2006 10:11:07 AM From DB/Inbox: Lucia A Keegan

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - Lebanon - U.S. Stance - GWOT
PARIS - Thursday, August 17, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Lebanon - U.S. Stance - GWOT

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

Today's top international story which is featured on the front page of Le Figaro is that "France would take command of the international force in Lebanon until next February," as announced on FR2 television last evening by MOD Alliot-Marie. Asking that the force's mission be defined, she is quoted in several outlets: "It is not about when and how many, but about what and how." Le Figaro says her position is appropriate given that the UNSCR does not "specify how to go about disarming Hezbollah." "No country in Europe, and least of all France, is ready to send troops where everything could explode any minute," writes the Beirut correspondent Lamia Oualalou, who quotes Alliot-Marie: "When one sends troops without a clear mission and without proper or sufficient means, it can lead to a

catastrophe."

Le Parisien titles its report: "France Wants a Well-Defined Mission" while on FR2 television MOD Alliot Marie said that "France is playing its traditional role in Lebanon, which is to protect the population." She asked the UN to "be more specific about the UNIFIL mission in Lebanon and to give soldiers the necessary means to protect themselves and to react if they are attacked." She added it would be very positive to include Muslim countries in the UNIFIL, "to avoid giving the image of the West against the Muslim world."

FM Douste-Blazy's visit to Beirut yesterday is widely reported. In Le Figaro the article notes his attempts to get Israel to "lift the air and sea blockade" as well as get assurances from Lebanon that "no weapons would be delivered to Hezbollah." The report indicates that the French delegation was at an impasse: "The Lebanese PM is incapable of disarming Hezbollah: disarmament must be voluntary... and will necessarily require associating Hezbollah's two patrons, Syria and Iran." On FR2 television, the reporter said: "Lebanon seems unable to disarm Hezbollah which is now more popular than ever." For Liberation, "Hezbollah is Complicating the Post-War Scenario." The editorial by Pierre Haski is a harsh criticism of President Bush and his remarks about Lebanon being a "third front" in the war against terror. (See Part C)

Le Figaro interviews Former Socialist FM Vedrine, "who denounces the 'fiasco' of the U.S. policy in the Middle East." According to Vedrine, Hezbollah can "still strike... and has managed to elicit greater resentment towards Israel in the Arab-Muslim world. On the Lebanese scene, it has garnered prestige..." Vedrine judges the U.S. action in this crisis as "negative. The Bush administration has a schematic vision which has led it to the situation in Iraq... and left it handicapped when it comes to dealing with all other Arab issues. Never was a U.S. administration as aligned with the Likud as this one... We are looking at the fiasco of the so-called GME... America's idea of fighting against terrorism leaves no room for a political approach... It is counter-productive because it has consolidated the wave of anti-west feelings... when in fact we should be separating the fundamentalist wave from the large majority of moderate Muslims. We need to break away from this policy... We must negotiate with Hamas and Hezbollah... America's 'boycotting' of Hamas renders our message of democratizing the Middle East inaudible. The Bush administration is condemning itself to failure."

The security situation in Iraq is reported by Le Figaro: "Self-defense Shia groups are taking on the Sunni guerrillas, which have been targeting civilians... 'Inter-religious' fighting has led 150,000 Iraqis to flee in the past four months. Delphine Minoui comments in Le Figaro that "the political class is impotent in the face of the daily violence which has caused the deaths of close to 6,000 civilians in the past two months." The report indicates that the security plan, "other than causing huge traffic jams, is essentially ineffective."

Le Figaro carries an op-ed jointly penned by the British and French Interior Ministers, John Reid and Nicholas Sarkozy, on fighting terrorism: "We share the belief that the best way to win the war against terrorism is international cooperation and shared vigilance from everyone."

A Figaro op-ed by Alexandre Adler contends that "after Joe Lieberman's defeat, it remains to be seen whether the American people will be able to recognize itself in a Democratic Party which is pacifist, anti-Zionist and narcissistic, and is influenced by Hollywood's star system."

Economic daily Les Echos, in its continuing series on the "Saga of Black Gold" examines "The Bush, Such a Powerful Family..." "The Bush family is of course oil and power. But it is also an extraordinary network of relations in the U.S., which for the past century has interwoven the mysterious 'Skull and Bones' society, high finance, steel, energy and Congress, with an important 'I scratch your back, you scratch mine' philosophy."

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

Lebanon - U.S. Stance - GWOT

"Unwelcome"

Pierre Haski in left-of-center Liberation (08/17): "With friends like President Bush, who needs enemies? Just when the conflict in Lebanon is on the brink of being resolved through a fragile equilibrium, the U.S. President has made remarks which will at best complicate the implementation of UNSCR 1701. By speaking of Lebanon as the 'third front' of the war against terror, along with Iraq and Afghanistan, he is inscribing the Israeli conflict with its Arab neighbors into the wider confrontation against the 'axis of evil.' Most countries about to send troops to bolster the international force in Lebanon do not recognize themselves in this crusade. First among them France. The American President's stance has the merit of ideological coherence, but not of diplomatic logic. What is the use of voting a resolution which is to rely on cooperation, if some of the essential parties are already characterized as mortal enemies... If one follows the Bush line of thinking, it is not a UNIFIL force which is needed, but the U.S. helping Israel to squash its indomitable enemy. The American President's logic is all the more unwelcome because his unilateral Iraq policy is a resounding failure, with his own military chiefs predicting a civil war. The international operation in Afghanistan under the auspices of the UN is also facing difficulties. It is obvious that the new UNIFIL mission in Lebanon will not be a walk in the park and that Hezbollah is not ready to be disarmed. All the more reason to keep from turning an already impossible mission into an ideological crusade. Failure is ensured if we follow Bush's logic." HOFMANN